

November 24, 2003

Dear Interested Agencies and Parties:

Today the Department of Ecology is releasing the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the Dungeness River Agricultural Water Users Association's Comprehensive Water Conservation Plan. The plan was prepared by Montgomery Water Group in 1999 but has been the subject of litigation and a subsequent delay in the availability of Ecology funding for water conservation improvement projects.

Completion of the FEIS will enable Ecology to move forward with decisions to fund irrigation-related conservation and efficiency projects in the Dungeness watershed. This State Environmental Policy Act analysis also will provide a basis for other funding entities needing SEPA assessment for project implementation.

The draft EIS, issued on Nov. 27, 2002, assessed alternatives and potential impacts of implementing the Plan. One alternative was added as a result of scoping. Projects with potential environmental effects proposed in the conservation plan include:

- Piping leaky open ditches
- Combining adjacent irrigation canals
- Building re-regulating reservoirs
- Abandoning a canal

A regional groundwater model also has been developed to quantitatively assess potential effects on area aquifers and other resources and water uses. This Final EIS contains an analysis surrounding the effects of full plan implementation – and incorporates the results of steady-state and transient groundwater modeling.

The plan and its proposed actions mitigate effects of irrigation diversions from the Dungeness River. The river is home to three species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as well as several other stocks in critical condition. Two Indian tribes have treaty fishing rights on the river, the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe.

Completion of this plan supports many related efforts underway in the watershed, including watershed planning under Chapter 90.82 RCW, development of the Comprehensive Irrigation District Management Plan, and implementation of projects under the auspices of the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board. This SEPA analysis will serve as the foundation of other irrigation improvement projects across the watershed.

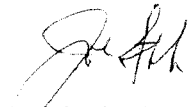
One delay was caused by concerns raised by a large private landowner in the vicinity. A settlement agreement has been reached that excludes an area on the east side of the river from project implementation for 18 months.

This document is being made available to agencies with jurisdiction, people who commented on the draft, members of the Dungeness River Management Team and Dungeness Technical Advisory Team members. Copies also are available at the Sequim and Port Angeles libraries, as well as the offices of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, the Clallam Conservation District and the city of Sequim.

Copies can be ordered from the Department of Ecology, Publications Distribution Center, P.O. Box 47600, Olympia, Washington 98504-7600.

We appreciate your interest in the Dungeness watershed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Stohr", is positioned above the printed name.

Joe Stohr, Manager  
Water Resources Program

November 24, 2003

Dear Interested Agencies and Parties:

The Department of Ecology is releasing the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) regarding implementation of the Dungeness River Agricultural Water Users Association's Comprehensive Water Conservation Plan. Based on this analysis, action may be taken by Ecology and other agencies after December 3, 2003.

Ecology may approve funding for conservation projects based on prior need and available funding. However, under a recent settlement agreement any decision to fund projects involving Graysmarsh will not be made until 18 months after the FEIS has been issued.

The purpose of the conservation plan is to reduce irrigation diversions from the Dungeness River in order to improve stream flow. The Dungeness River is home to three fish species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as well as several other fish stocks in critical condition. Two Indian tribes have treaty fishing rights on the river, the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe.

Projects with potential environmental effects proposed in the conservation plan include piping leaky open ditches, combining adjacent irrigation canals, building re-regulating reservoirs, and abandoning a canal.

A draft EIS was issued on Nov. 27, 2002, that assessed alternatives and potential impacts of implementing the plan.

The main issues addressed in the EIS include two categories:

- Reduced stream flows in the Dungeness River resulting from irrigation diversions have an effect on fish species.
- Increased efficiency of existing irrigation-water delivery systems will reduce the quantity of tailwater entering small streams as well as water entering the shallow aquifer in at least some places in the project area – and could have an impact on wetlands, creeks, and human uses of the shallow aquifer.

Alternatives that were fully analyzed included:

- No funding action to implement the conservation plan.

- Implementation of the full conservation plan.
- Implementation of the most cost-effective elements of the conservation plan.
- Implementation of those elements of the conservation plan with less impact on small streams and wetlands.

A regional ground water model was developed as a tool to help inform the analysis and to estimate the effects on ground water and surface waters of the various alternatives. An estimate of water savings was made for each alternative showing benefits to Dungeness River stream flow.

This document is being made available to agencies with jurisdiction, people who commented on the draft, members of the Dungeness River Management Team and Dungeness Technical Advisory Team members. Copies also are available at the Sequim and Port Angeles libraries, as well as the offices of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, the Clallam Conservation District and the city of Sequim.

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Joe Stohr, Manager  
Water Resources Program